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ABSTRACT

Teachers serving children with disabilities in the regular preschool environment face challenges working within the typical small group instructional framework while systematically targeting specific skill acquisition goals. This paper describes a model integrated preschool/daycare program that uses a matrix-type process for determining the most appropriate instructional formats for carrying out each Individualized Education Program (IEP) objective within an integrated preschool setting. The assessment process begins with a survey of environments within which the special needs child is expected to function. Development of IEP goals is guided by principles of generalization and functionality. Instruction is best delivered through distribution of trials or opportunities across natural and functional activities occurring in the daily schedule. The daily schedule is structured around typical preschool activities. If children demonstrate need for more intense instruction on a specific skill, time is set aside in the schedule for stories and individual instruction, which is often delivered by trained volunteers or college practicum students. The teacher monitors progress by matching instructional objectives with ongoing activities in the preschool schedule. The paper reports positive feedback from parents regarding the program, and noticeable gains in social, daily living, and communication skills among special needs students. (DHP)

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Integrating Special Needs Children Into Regular Preschool Settings: Selecting Instructional Formats to Implement IEP Goals

Local education agencies in all communities are experiencing the impact of P.L. 99-457 as they are asked to provide free and appropriate educational opportunities to eligible 3 to 5 year old children with special educational needs. To comply with the clear legislative mandate for provision of these services in least restrictive environments, young children with disabilities are increasingly being placed in regular preschool programs including kindergarten, Headstart and a variety of daycare arrangements. For the rural community, this approach not only satisfies legislative intent of placement in the LRE, but is a cost effective practice being utilized in many sparsely populated areas. There are clear challenges faced by teachers serving children with disabilities in the regular preschool environment. On the one hand they are encouraged to rely less on the traditional special education practice of pull-out, isolated 1:1 instruction and to educate those children within the typical preschool instructional framework of small group, activity based instruction. At the same time, teachers are expected to systematically target specific skill acquisition goals articulated in the child's IEP.

The purpose of this paper is to describe a model, integrated preschool/daycare program established on a state college campus in which a matrix-type process has been developed for determining the most appropriate instructional formats for carrying out each IEP objective within an integrated, preschool setting. Salient features of the integrated, preschool/daycare model will be described with emphasis on the process for meshing IEP goals into the activity based curriculum of the regular preschool program. The rationale developed for selecting the integrated, small group, activity-based setting as opposed to the traditional, pull-out 1:1 setting will be discussed. The data collection systems devised for tracking student progress on IEP objectives will be detailed for the reader.

The Teaching Research Child Development Center was established on the campus of Western Oregon State College in Monmouth, Oregon, to serve children previously served in two separate, segregated programs: a regular,community based daycare facility which served 55 children of the college's students and an early intervention preschool serving eighteen children with moderate to severe handicaps. Children are assigned, primarily by chronological age, to one of the Center's four classrooms. Approximately 14 children are served in each classroom- six with varying kinds of handicapping conditions and 8 typically developing children.This assignment provides the total or "whole program" placement. All services for the child with special needs are provided within the context of the integrated program, requiring therapists to serve the child on a consultative basis rather than traditional "pull out therapy". The program is

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designed to serve all children ages 3-5 who reside in the geographic catchment area. This more normalized placement practice eliminates the need to engage the child in time limited, artificial pull-out integration experience. The "whole program" placement for the special needs student avoids many of the problems associated with partial placement options. Issues of transporting students, overly long days for the preschooler, and disproportionate time investments in the child with special needs by the regular program, are all minimized when the total placement of the child is in the regular, community program. In addition, bonding to the group is enhanced by such a placement. This set of issues formed a compelling reason for Teaching Research to consider the "whole program" approach for the integration of children with disabilities. Additional considerations were dissatisfaction with previous experiences with more traditional "pull out" types of mainstreaming or reverse mainstreaming.

The wholly integrated preschool model facilitates the use of functional and age appropriate instruction for the young child with special needs. The design and implementation of instructional programs is driven by a comprehensive, on-going assessment process that examines the demands of current and future environments. The Teaching Research program subscribes to an assessment process that is summarized in Figure 1. This approach links assessment to intervention and provides for a system of data collection that serves as an on-going assessment of the child's progress toward instructional goals.

The assessment/program planning process begins with a survey of relevant environments the special needs child is expected to function within. Although this approach to determining relevant goals was initially popularized in adult programs and was most closely referenced to vocational and independent living skills, its application in the early childhood arena is proving to be most beneficial. The wholly integrated setting especially facilitates evaluation of the child's skills and deficits relative to the least restrictive, normalized environment since he/she is functioning full time in that environment. All of the skills necessary to function in this least restrictive environment will be very easily determined by the teacher responsible for assessment. The home and selected community environments are also areas that would be surveyed in the assessment of the child. Input from families is especially relevant when one is attempting to determine what environments the child and his family will be likely to experience.

Once the complete set of preferred skills is determined from the environmental inventories, the child is assessed against that body of skill descriptors. In many cases, the teacher is able to observe the special needs child as he participates in the integrated preschool and determine his skill proficiencies and deficiences. Some other skills will be more easily determined through interview with key people in the environment- parents, bus driver, playground supervisor, etc. Finally, there may be a few skills that require direct testing. If there will not be a reliable opportunity to observe that skill within the naturally occurring schedule, the teacher will need to manufacture the task in a somewhat artificial fashion. Many commercially available assessment instruments lend themselves to this type of assessment.

Once the child has been assessed against the body of necessary skills, it will usually be necessary to prioritize in order to determine which will be selected from the total possible set for inclusion on the current IEP. This becomes an easier task for the teacher when the child is placed in a wholly

ASSESSMENT AND CURRICULUM PLANNING

1. **Survey Relevant Environments**

2. **Assess Student**

   - observation
   - interview
   - direct testing

3. **Prioritize Deficit Skills**

4. **Set IEP Objectives**

5. **Determine Programming Formats**

6. **Develop Individualized Programs**

Figure 1

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integrated setting. Considerations for prioritizing will include:which skill(s) will most increase the child's ability to function effectively in his present environment(s); which skills will be most functional in future environments; is the skill important to the family; is the skill measurable, etc.

The IEP process is maintained in much the same way in an integrated setting as it would be in a more traditional segregated program. The model developed at Teaching Research has assigned staff in such a way that each unit of two classrooms each is directed by a special education trained teacher who assumes primary responsibility for development and monitoring of the IEP.

Development of each IEP goal should be guided by principles of generalization and functionality. Goals directed toward this end become more generic versus splinter specific and are written toward naturally occurring learning opportunities within the daily classroom routine. After the IEP goals have been determined, the teacher then faces the challenge of determining instructional programming formats and drafting the specific details of individual programs. This step in the program planning process is seen as acutely critical when considering the peculiarities of the integrated preschool program versus traditional, self-contained special classrooms. Staff in the Teaching Research program devoted a great deal of attention to this issue when components of the program were being formulated. It should be noted that the program approaches this task from the bias that all instruction ideally should occur in the most naturally occurring setting within a preschool program- usually small groups. There must exist a compelling reason that instruction would occur in a 1:1 situation, isolated from the group. The instructional format options to be considered as each IEP goal is analyzed are summarized in Figure 2. It should also be assumed that instruction is best delivered through distribution of trials or opportunities across natural and functional activities occurring in the daily schedule. This decision point reflects a change from more traditional special education practice of repetitive or massed trial teaching which usually occurred in a 1:1, isolated setting. Staff developed a matrix type format for assisting them in analyzing each IEP goal and relating the programming format of each goal to activities or opportunities for teaching within the daily classroom routine. See Figure 3 for an example of the matrix. For each goal, the teacher will look for natural opportunities within the classroom schedule for incorporation of teaching to the goal. She is guided in her decision by previously stated biases and the question, "Can I logically and naturally target this particular skill within the morning circle(examp.)activity? Whenever possible, we avoid contrived or forced teaching situations and wait for more natural times in the routine. It will happen, on occasion, that a given goal cannot realistically be incorporated into existing routines and activities and will need to be targeted as a pull-out, 1:1 teaching format. This format can incorporate distributed trials, however, which will assist the child in generalizing the skill beyond the training setting. A last resort, when the child needs prolonged and repetitive practice, massed trial teaching would be chosen.

Meshing the instructional program of the special needs child into the regular preschool program requires the teacher to take several factors into account including:

1. facilitation of IEP goals within typical preschool activities
2. the maintenance of a balance between teacher directed and child initiated activities
3. the provision of a variety of instructional formats (small group,

SELECTING PROGRAMMING FORMATS

1.	2.	3.
GROUP	DISTRIBUTED TRIALS	NATURAL ENV.
1:1	MASSED TRIALS	LIMITED ENV.

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Figure 2

NAME: Alec

ACTIVITIES MATRIX

ACTIVITY (Location)	Time Instructor	IEP GOAL TRIALS (Dispersed. Mass)	Reach to Request Choice	Manipulate Objects	Vocal Development
Arrival	8:30-9:00			X	
Choice	9:00-9:15			X	
Circle	9:15-9:30			X	
Manipulation Group	9:30-9:50		X	X	
Art/Music Group	9:50-10:10		X	X	
Exploration Group	10:10-10:30		X	X	
Snack	10:30-11:00		X	X	
P.E./Outside	11:00-11:30			X	
Story / 1:1	11:30-12:00			X	X

Figure 3

large group and individual instruction
4. the efficient use of staff
5. the assurance of heterogeneous groupings.

The daily schedule is structured around typical preschool activities including dramatic play, exploratory play, art, outside play time, manipulative play, individual work, storytime and snack. Activities are varied between teacher and child initiated activities. Figure 4 is a display of the daily classroom schedule. During the time set aside for small group instruction (learning centers) children are organized into three groups, each with three to five children. The children are assigned to these groups to insure heterogeneous groupings and to allow staff to accommodate a specific child's needs on a daily basis. Children rotate among three learning centers, remaining with their originally assigned small group. The learning centers focus activities around three general areas: manipulatives, exploration and art.

The manipulatives group is primarily teacher directed and children select from a wide variety of materials (puzzles, constructions, assemblies, etc) Since each child is working with a unique material, the teacher can easily slip in instructional opportunities for the special needs child without disrupting the flow of the group's work. The exploration group is basically child initiated activity involving interaction with the materials available that day- sand, water, blocks, science or dramatic play. The art group includes all types of art and craft activities. Projects planned for this group include both teacher and child initiated activities ranging from finger painting to making potpourri hearts for Mother's Day gifts.

As mentioned in earlier paragraphs, some children may demonstrate the need fore more intense instruction on a specific skill or portion of a skill sequence. In this case, there is a 20 minute time set aside in the daily schedule for stories and individual instruction. This type instruction is often delivered by trained volunteers or college practicum students who are supervised by classroom staff.

A system for data based instruction was devised to enable the teacher to manage instruction and monitor progress of a special needs child within the typical, preschool program. The system is used to track child progress in group and individual settings and obtain discrete trial data for dispersed trial and massed trial instruction. The system matches instructional objectives with ongoing activities in the preschool schedule, thus prescribing the appropriate, natural setting for instruction. A data format, cross-referencing the objective and the schedule is used to collect ongoing data as illustrated in Figure 5. A task analyzed skill sequence is used allowing the teacher to prescribe small step, breakdowns of the whole task when necessary.

In summary, program staff have been encouraged by results of the program. Many parents , both of typical and special needs children, have given positive feedback to staff regarding the benefits of the wholly integrated program for their child. It is too soon to draw many conclusions from the data relative to child progress, but all observations would indicate that the special needs children are making noticeable gains in social , daily living and communication skills.

Daily Schedule

Time	Activity	Grouping and Instruction
8:00	Arrival	1:1 in natural environment
9:00	Choice	Large group/child initiated
9:15	Circle	Large group/teacher directed
9:30	Learning centers	Small group/teacher directed and child initiated
10:30	Bathrooming	1:1 in the natural environment
	Snack	Small group/teacher directed and a time for children to interact
11:00	Outside/gross motor	Large group/child directed
11:30	Story and 1:1	Small groups and 1:1 instruction in a limited environment
12:00	Departure	1:1 in the natural environment

Figure 4